

MICHIGAN WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY POLICY REGARDING COUGARS

The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy (MWC) mission to help wildlife is defined as follows: **To restore, conserve and preserve fish, wildlife and habitat throughout Michigan.**

The following is the MWC's goal on cougars as adopted by its Board of Trustees on March 15, 2003:

The MWC seeks to foster an effective management program for cougars that ensures the minimum genetic diversity to support a small, sustainable population.

The MWC hopes to accomplish this goal through the following recommendations:

1. Full recognition of the species as wild, resident and breeding.
2. Stop the illegal killing of cougars.
3. Develop a reward program for tips on illegal kills.
4. Educate Michigan citizens about cougar biology and how to avoid dangerous encounters.
5. Assess viability of the population by doing genetic testing.
6. Don't change any forest/wildlife management practices.
7. Don't close roads or set aside certain lands.
8. Manage cougar numbers under a social carrying capacity concept.
9. No kill permits unless human life threatened.
10. Act against cougars that appear habituated, are too observable, or repeatedly kill livestock.
11. Consider a legally established no-kill season for hound hunters.
12. Remove excess animals through hunting or other means.

Michigan Wildlife Conservancy

From: "Valerie West" <valerie.west@oakpress.com>
To: "Michigan Wildlife Conservancy" <wildlife@miwildlife.org>
Sent: Friday, December 05, 2008 11:54 AM
Subject: Re: The Oakland Press

Cougar sightings prompt dispute among wildlife organizations

By VALERIE WEST Of The Oakland Press

Cougar sightings continue to be reported throughout the state, yet the existence of the predator in Michigan is creating controversy between wildlife organizations.

In 2003, there were three Oakland County sightings reported to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Web site, said Michael Bailey, Species and Habitat Section supervisor for the MDNR. In 2007, there were 11. Statewide, there were 71 in 2002, and 338 for 2008.

Recently, there was a cougar sighting reported in Novi, and a large black cat reported in Milford.

Black cougars, although rare, are possible, said Dennis Fijalkowski, executive director of the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy. A black cougar is like the equivalent of an albino animal; both parents need to have the recessive gene and can be common in cases of inbreeding, he said.

About 8 percent of Michigan cougar reports to the conservancy have been for black panthers, which leads Fijalkowski to believe that there is a small cougar population breeding in the state.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources does not agree, and said there is no hard evidence of cougars in the Lower Peninsula. A carcass, hair samples, scat or animal tracks are needed as evidence, Bailey said.

Many times, the DNR will investigate reports only to find deer or dog tracks.

"A lot of times, you can't trust your eyes," he said. "There is no reproducing cougar population in Michigan."

He added that there is one known male in the Upper Peninsula.

Fijalkowski believes otherwise.

The conservancy has documented scat, track and hair samples and received photos from citizens that verify a small cougar population in the Upper and Lower peninsulas, he said, adding that the animals don't just live in the deep woods. It's another point where the conservancy and the DNR disagree.

The DNR, however, does not consider the conservancy's reports as evidence.

The cougar is listed as a Michigan endangered species.

"The state is violating the endangered species act," Fijalkowski said. "If the animal exists, we must recover the population."

Whether one cougar or hundreds exist, the animal needs to be managed, he said, further speculating that the DNR won't acknowledge a cougar population because it would cost money and resources to bring the species back.

Retired Michigan DNR forester Mike Zuidema agreed, and said in a 2008 Chicago television report that the DNR may be covering up the Michigan cougar for financial reasons.

Zuidema, of Escanaba, was featured in the report after a cougar was shot by Chicago police. He also reported cougar tracks in the Upper Peninsula that were confirmed by the DNR.

"They don't want to get into endangered species management and take funds away from their No. 1



Photo courtesy of Michigan Wildlife Conservancy

Photo of a cougar taken by Jim Deutsch on the property of Larry Lippert in western Alcona County in the Lower Peninsula in August 1997.



Photo courtesy of Michigan Wildlife Conservancy Photo of a cougar taken by George White on hunt club property in eastern Oscoda County in 1993, just five miles from the 1997 Alcona County photo shown on Page A-1.

Michigan Wildlife Conservancy wrote:

Valerie,

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WEATHER, PAGE 2

Stunned motorist convinced he saw cougar

GREG NELSON

FOR THE SAGINAW NEWS

MOUNT PLEASANT — The huge feline scampering across the road was no bobcat, Dennis Hutchinson insists.

It was far too big, leading Hutchinson to believe he spotted a cougar.

The 50-year-old, who lives in Isabella County's Deerfield Township and owns Central Michigan X-Ray, was coming back from Big Rapids about 10:30 a.m. one day recently when a traffic wreck routed him off M-20 and onto Winn.

"I went to Deerfield Road, then turned north onto Meridian Road," Hutchinson said. "About a quarter-mile down the road, I saw something brown moving.

"At first I thought it was a deer, but

then I saw it had a big long tail and was low to the ground. It walked across the road about 100 yards in front of my truck and hopped a ditch.

"I was just stunned. I used to hunt, and I know it wasn't a bobcat. It was huge. I just kept staring at it thinking, 'Oh my gosh! If I hadn't physically seen it, I probably wouldn't have believed it, either.'"

Other people claim to have seen cougars in mid-Michigan in recent months.

However, state Department of Natural Resources officials say there is no evidence to support the presence of cougars here or anywhere else in the state.

"It's all speculation," said Wildlife Biologist Rex Ainslie, who works at the DNR's Bay City Operations Center. "It's hard to discount anyone's personal sight-

ings, and we do get periodic reports from people, but there has been nothing substantiated by sightings (from DNR officers) or tracks."

Cougars, also called mountain lions, once were native to Michigan, but the last known wild cougar was taken near Newberry in 1906.

The closest state with a known cougar population is North Dakota, Ainslie said.

"One could wander into Michigan," Ainslie said. "That's always a possibility. Adult males can travel a long ways."

It's possible someone released a cougar from captivity or it escaped, he said.

A Central Michigan University and Michigan Wildlife Conservancy study tested eight DNA samples from Michigan that tested positive as cougars. ♦